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AUTHOR Loge, Peter
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ABSTRACT

Although many Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA) coaches and debaters wish to establish "stock issues" (categories of questions that people naturally ask when confronting a resolution), there are several strong arguments against establishing stock issues in CEDA debate. To enhance the educational value of the activity, stock issues for each round should be decided by the debaters during the round. For example, if a debate team wishes to defend a policy position, they should say so and then set criteria for judging that policy position. Debaters could set the context of the debate and its stock issues, and the bounds within which resolutions could be weighed would be limited only by the insight of the affirmative. This type of context anarchy is at least as educationally sound as stock-issue totalitarianism. Educational advantages to this approach include improving communication skills, focusing on critical thinking, and providing pre-professional preparation. Context-dependent arguments would also foster thinking skills, and increase the liveliness of debate rounds. For the benefit of the debaters, CEDA debate should not constrain debate, but rather let loose the winds of anarchy. (MM)

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Arguments Against Establishing Stock Issues in CEDA Debate
a call for context anarchy

Peter Loge
Graduate Assistant Debate Coach
Syracuse University
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CEDA was founded with the spirit of experiment; that spirit should be rejuvenated.
-Michael Bartanen, CEDA Yearbook 1987

Introduction

Of late there has been a fuss over the establishment of 'rules' for CEDA debate. Coaches and debaters complain about the lack of consistent standards by which to judge debate rounds. Often, these disdainful cries point to a need to establish 'stock-issues' in CEDA with which all debate rounds could be decided. One of the few positive things that these critics have to say about the NDT is the existence of accepted stock-issues, noting that every affirmative must "include analysis of 'significance', 'inherency' and 'solvency' as the elements of a prima facie case. Other writers include 'absence of disadvantages' and 'topicality' as stock issues."(Bartanen 42). There are no similar accepted standards for CEDA. Non-policy pundits are rushing to fill this gap by creating what they consider to be The Way CEDA rounds ought to be judged. It is my position that ALL of them, and many others, may be 'correct'; what the stock issues are for a given round is for the debaters to decide during the round. By forcing the debaters to debate debate (implicitly or explicitly) we, as coaches and critics, will be enhancing the educational value of the activity. To understand why this is so, first an examination of the state of

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the world is in order, then a look to the my proposal and its advantages.

The State of the World

Patterson and Zarefsky in their 1983 book, Contemporary Debate, explain that "issues fall into categories of questions that a reasonable person would naturally ask when confronting a resolution of a given type. These categories of issues that repeatedly arise are called stock issues."(23) The importance of establishing stock issues was noted by Michael Bartanen, "The identification of relevant stock issues plays an important role in the debate round. Arguers must identify the issues they are to disagree about in order to facilitate meaningful debate."(42) Clearly, if there is no ruler with which to measure the issues, they cannot logically be measured at all. Here, however, is where the agreement ends.

The first question is, "what type of resolution is debated in CEDA"? If one attends a national CEDA meeting, one gets the impression that CEDA desparatly is trying to not be NDT. Unfortunately, definition through negation of a division is far from sufficient. Some have written that CEDA is strictly non-policy. Others note that it can be both value and policy, as Harold Lawson wrote, "many debaters and even some coaches erroneously believe that CEDA topics must be value propositions, this is untrue. CEDA coaches are normally offered one or more propositions of policy which could be selected as the national CEDA resolution."(16). Yet others argue that CEDA inherently has

policy implications (Herbeck and Wong 1986, Patterson and Zarefsky 1983). Many debaters in the spring of 1988 (Resolved: That the American judicial system has overemphasized freedom of the press) maintained that it was a proposition of fact. Clearly there is no consensus of what CEDA is.

Since no one person can say what, exactly, the type of claim it is (or should be) argued, and what implications that claim has, no one has been able to 'invent' a set of stock issues to cover them. Many have attempted to locate resolutional type dependant stock issues (Patterson and Zarefsky, Bartanen 1987, Thomas and Fryar 1981) with out claiming that CEDA must adhere to one of the resolutional types; some have written that, "there is reason to believe that traditional stock issues are relevant to value debate"(Brownlee 290) others have attempted to create a set of stock issues for all of non-policy debate (Gill, 1986) and maintain that that is what CEDA is. This controversy shows no signs of letting up, and is bringing to light some fascinating ways of looking at the world. All of these attempts should be celebrated--and debated--by debaters.

From some this morass represents one of CEDAs' biggest drawbacks. For me, it represents the activities greatest asset: anarchy.

Proposal

I suggest that the stock issues for each debate round should be decided in that round. If a debate team wishes to defend a policy position, they should say so and then set criteria for

judging that policy position; if a team wanted to evaluate the resolution in a political model--one in which the judge played the role of the political candidate, and the two teams the roles of rival political consulting firms, attempting to convince the 'candidate' of the political efficacy of taking a stand in favor or against the resolution at hand--then a criteria and stock-issues which focused on electoral politics would be appropriate. Using the same analysis, teams could defend propositions on purely moral grounds (defining that which is 'moral' in the criteria), religious grounds, etc., etc. The bounds of the manner in which resolutions could be weighed is limited only by the insight of the affirmative. If the affirmative criteria were unreasonable, undebatable, or unacceptable for other reasons, then the negative could (and should) challenge it, arguing for a use of a different paradigm.

Advantages

To understand why this confusion and apparent hopeless mess should be celebrated, one need turn only as far as the educational values of debate. In locating exactly what those educational values are Colbert and Biggers wrote that, "First, forensic competition improves the students' communication skills. Second, forensics provides a unique educational experience because of the way it promotes depth of study, complex analysis and focused critical thinking. Third, forensics offers excellent pre-professional preparation."(237) These three areas were supported with studies, and seem eminently reasonable. This

being the case, it seems fitting to apply stock-issue anarchy to all three.

The first reason we should support forensics is because it "improves communication skills". While one can bicker endlessly over the merits of speaking quickly, the idea that debaters are forced to speak to a very limited audience type, within the confines of traditional policy-making or CEDA debate, certainly limits the possibility for communication skill improvement. If a debater is forced (by virtue of the ballot) to adapt not only speed, but also frame of reference, they will acquire more depth and breadth in their skills. The manner in which Congressmen speak to their constituents is far different than the manner in which they address colleagues on the floor of the House. Encouraging a variance in the venues of speech will clearly add depth to communication skills level.

The second reason we should support forensics is because it "provides a unique educational experience because of the way it promotes depth of study, complex analysis and focused critical thinking." Here in lie the greatest benefits of theory anarchy. Currently policy debaters look at a topic and want to answer a very limited number of questions, all relating to what happens if one were to try to make the resolution come true. There is no analysis of the theological questions involved, the philosophical merits, the political impacts, the relative morality, or anything else that doesn't move one towards or away from nuclear war. The analysis is deep, but narrow. Establishing stock issues in CEDA

would do the same. If, however, one were forced (by the ballot again) to examine all of the ramifications and angles of a given topic, their depth and breadth of study and ability to engage in complex analysis would certainly improve. A debater would have to look at all sides of an issue--not just those that apply to policy implications. Indeed, debaters would have to examine the underlying moral schema of a given topic; they would be forced to view the world as an oil magnate, would-be dictator, pacifist and Zen Buddhist. In researching debate topics students would need to look beyond Foreign Affairs and The New York Times, and into religious and political theory, communication theory, and the specific stock issues that affect a wide variety of specific fields. Again, clearly adding to the depth and breadth of study.

The final area that Colbert and Biggers say forensics helps is in the realm of pre-professional training. Few would argue that the ability to flip growth five times in a minute and a half is good pre-professional training--they don't even do that in the U.N. The type of pre-professional training that debate provides mostly consists of a good work ethic, the ability to problem solve, and the ability to work under pressure. Debate, with or with out stock issues helps in all of these areas. The one thing that stock issue anarchy would help is in the ability to look at a problem from many angles, and to be able to 'sell' a position in many different situations. Any professional must be able to adapt to any number of situations: a lawyer must be able to appeal to a judge as well as jury; a politician to polls and

publics: and businessmen to bankers and bilkers. By encouraging debate rounds to encompass all of these audiences, and more, we cannot help but to increase the educational benefits of debate.

Context

An underlying theme of all of the above analysis is that of context. "Context", according to Patterson and Zarefsky, "refers to the set of underlying assumptions or values on which the entire argument depends."(10) Every event occurs in, and is interpreted in, a context. Debaters must put arguments into a context, and argue them in that context. Currently, there are some assumed contexts; that the judge will render a decision based on policy, value, or sometimes factual grounds. This is a remarkably narrow scope. The impacts of debate rounds are measured in numbers killed or all-encompassing values ("freedom"). Yet very little of the argumentation that goes on in the 'real world' will use those contexts. More often then not, the context will be political (will it get me enough votes to win without sacrificing my integrity?) economic (will it make money?), or personal (does this action fit my personal values?) and many more. By letting the debaters pick the context, or venue, of the debate we would be increasing the educational value of debate by letting them argue closer to 'the real world'.

Examples

To further clarify what I am proposing, we can turn to a specific hypothetical example. The spring 1987 CEDA debate topic read: Resolved: That mandatory testing of employees for

controlled substances is an unwarrented invasion of privacy. Many debate teams to a quasi-policy approach, and argued that there were better, less intrusive means of solving the problem of drugs in the work-place; some took a values approach and explained that the right to privacy was so great that it could not be abridged for economic reasons; other teams took fairly similar tacks. An application of stock-issue anarchy could have led to a series of other case areas. A team could have argued a political paradigm: argued that a candidate would be better served (electorally) by holding that mandatory drug-testing was unjust. Here the team would have to first establish that the debate could reasonably take place in the political context, then establish a criteria by which to measure the political efficacy of such action (against testing). The affirmative would then offer contentions that pointed to Americans fear of the growing power of big-business, their demand to be left alone, the feeling that what one does at home is no one elses business, etc. The negative would then be obliged to argue that politically drug-testing was popular, would make the candidate look strongly anti-drug, etc. Another approach that the affirmative could take could be that of the business owner. Again, the affirmative would have to establish that a business context was a reasonable one, and then set a criteria that fit that context (probably based on profit-margin). The affirmative would then offer contentions that pointed to the amount of money lost due to illicit substance abuse in America, and the apparent success of

mandatory drug-testing at hedging that abuse and its subsequent losses. The negative team could then counter that in the long-run the business' productivity would decrease due to a feeling of dis-trust between management and employees, that other means of solving the drug-problem would work better, that drug-use on the job wasn't really a problem, etc. In both of these examples, the affirmative is choosing the context for the debate, then setting a criteria based on that context, and establishing what stock-issues are appropriate for that context and criteria. The negative team has the option of accepting the affirmative interpretation--which it should do if the affirmative is reasonable--or rejecting the affirmative interpretation by demonstrating that the affirmative interpretation is unreasonable (for instance, if the affirmative, in our example, chose to argue from the drug-dealers perspective, thus leaving the negative no ground for clearly the drug-dealer would be opposed to any attempts to curb drug use), and thus replacing the affirmative criteria with one of its own. If the negative chose the latter of the two strategies (demonstrating that the affirmative was unreasonable), and could do so, then the affirmative would lose on the ground that it was unreasonable; the negatives position, then, would be a substitute one simply to prove that another context for the debate--a reasonable one--could have been chosen.

Having established that paradigmatic anarchy is at least as educationally sound as stock-issue totalitarianism, I will now turn to answer some critics of this model of debate.

Responces to Critisisms

In discussing this idea with both debaters and colleagues, some common criticisms arise, most of which are answerable.

Some note that allowing the affirmative to not only choose the case area, but also the context, would be abusive to negative teams. The negative, in their view, would have to prepare on virtually every angle--an impossible task--while the affirmative need only find an obscure set of stock issues based on an alien concept that few have ever heard of. While this comment is not without merit, it is easily responded to. If the affirmative context were too obscure then the standard theoretical attacks could be launched. If it could be shown that the affirmative didn't present, "a significant and representational example(s) of the resolution, presented through reasonable definition of terms" (Lawson 20), then the case could be dismissed on those grounds alone, as noted above. The negative team would then be obligated to present their own context and appropriate stock issues, and defend them (providing the judge a second, independent, reason to vote negative).

Another complaint of my proposal is that it would work against the novice. It is hard enough, the critics charge, for the new debater to figure out what's going on now, with out changing round-to-round. True again. There are two levels of response here. The first is that, paradoxically, it may help the novice. Those who are bright, but haven't memorized enough terms and rules, could attack the differing contexts on the purely

intellectual level thus minimizing any advantage that the varsity debater might have. The second response is much more substantial. There is currently a lot of debate that the novice cannot understand. Someone who comes out of speech 110 would be as blown away by a team arguing that totalitarianism is good or that a conditional counter-plan is justified as they would be floating contexts. Luckily for the novice, few are exposed to that sort of debate. The more intricate and involved debate (not only of positions, but also of theory) tends to take place at the very highest level of debate. There is no reason to believe that it would be different with contexts.

A further argument against my idea is that there would be more 'debate about debate' and less debate over 'substantive issues'. Again, two levels of response. The first is that this may or may not be the case. A given topic might lend itself to two or three contexts that most teams consider reasonable, and the semesters debate would take place in those contexts...without significant complaint from the negative. While it would add another few minutes at the beginning of the first affirmative (to set the ground), it need not take any more. The second level of response is that even if there were more debate about debate, it would not detract from the educational value of the activity. The reasons to support debate, set out by Colbert and Biggers, say nothing of 'substantive issues'. Indeed, those who support the activity would put the fact that debaters learn one specific area in great detail, as a benefit very low on the list. That I,

having debate the spring 1987 topic, know more about the GCMS drug test than most of my peers, is not one of the things that I point to when speaking of the good that debate did (and still does) me. That debaters learn a lot about a given area is tangential. By debating debate, debaters will be forced to critically think, be made to look at the world in ways that they are not made to now, and have to address issues and audiences and their ramifications, in ways that are not done now. Indeed, if anything, debating contexts would enhance the educational value of debate. Teams would still have to do the in depth research required (if not more to have evidence to support and attack differing contexts), and would also be looking at the world in ways that they don't now.

Additional Advantages

Allowing the debaters to select the context for the debate would also work to diminish some of the current practices that many see as unfavorable. A team that didn't have (or didn't want to use) large back-files researched debate camps, could circumvent those files by selecting a context that precluded them. For example, what would be the use of arguing deforestation or space-junk against a team that used a political paradigm? What good does it do to run 30 pages of 'growth is good' against someone arguing in the moralistic ideal? The answer simply is none. The affirmative need only respond to the briefs with a simple, "this doesn't meet our stock-issues, and falls outside of the context of the affirmative, therefore it has

no bearing on the round."

Context-dependant arguments would also foster thinking skills. If ones ox-box full of nuclear-terrorism briefs were mooted out by a team wishing to compare existentialism to essentialism, thinking would have to go on. The negative would be forced to examine the premises and claims of the affirmative. They would have to debate the affirmative, not compare depth and speed. Few would argue that clash on the intellectual level fosters bad debate.

The 'problem of speed' (if one sees it as such) could also be mooted by context. For clarification, we can again turn to the political example. If the judge were a political candidate, and the debate teams rival consulting firms trying to convince him or her to take a given position, it would hardly behove the 'consultants' to speak as quickly as possible; very few political candidates can take a good flow, and fewer still base their decisions to hire and fire on words-per-minute.

A final area of benefit that merits exploration is one designed for us, the critics. By the end of the semester, debates can get fairly dull. If one coaches and judges with any regularity, the arguments can become frighteningly mundane; it is not unusual for the judges to mouth the evidence while the debater is reading it. To say that debate rounds can get dull is an understatement. Yet, with the contexts of debate rounds being decided in the round, with each context challenging the judge to take a different role and to look at the arguments in a different

light, judging could be infinitely more interesting. The debaters could show the judge a new way to look at the world, or to force the judge to take an active role. The debate round would be more than voice boxes yelling at a stack of yellow, pink and white paper. Debate would be dynamic.

Conclusion

Having assessed the state of the world with its apparent flaws, and (being a former 1AR), 'turned' them into advantages, it is clear that CEDA debate is in a glorious state of theoretical anarchy. I do not mean to say that there is anything wrong with current stock-issues, or proposals for said issues; I am not setting that one paradigm or criteria should be applied to CEDA debate (and thus insinuating that all others are somehow inferior); I am arguing that all sets of ideas about CEDA are equally valid, and that ideas yet to be born are as valid as those in existence. It is my opinion that those issues and paradigms should be set forth in the round, by the debaters themselves. Anarchistic thought maintains that one should not do because one is told to, but that one should do because one believes that one should. All ideas should be tested, and debated. It is this state of anarchy that should be celebrated and encouraged by coaches, critics and competitors. We, in CEDA debate, stand at a sort of a cross-road; we can move towards set of rules to constrain debate, or we can let loose the winds of anarchy. For the benefit of the debaters, and the activity as a whole, we should choose the latter.

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